

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT  
Idaho State Office  
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In Reply Refer To:  
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March 13, 2003

EMS  
Instruction Memorandum No. ID-2003-042  
Expires: 09/30/2004

To: ICT

From: State Director

Subject: Policy for Managing Livestock During and After Drought

**Program Area:** Drought Management

**Purpose:** This Instruction Memorandum (IM) establishes the policy for managing public land resources during severe and extended drought. This IM includes direction from Washington Office (WO) IM No. 2003-074, FY 2003 General Drought Management Direction.

**Policy/Action:** During drought conditions, rangeland administered by the Idaho Bureau of Land Management (BLM) will be managed to maintain long-term productivity and rangeland health. Many public land resources and resource uses are affected by drought, including livestock grazing, wildlife, fisheries, wild horses, and recreation and wilderness use. The BLM must be sensitive to the needs of those who use and rely on public land for their livelihood and we must be consistent in our approach to drought management within Idaho. Communications must be continuous within the Bureau and with those who have an interest in the management of public land. Management decisions will be timely and based on the most current and reliable data available.

Four time periods will be used to outline drought management tasks or activities. The first time period, *early assessment phase*, begins at least four months before livestock turnout or other uses begin. The second time period, *preseason assessment phase*, is within three months of livestock turnout. The third time period is the *continuing assessment phase*, which occurs during the grazing season. The fourth time period is the *post-drought phase*, during which field offices will do an interdisciplinary evaluation of resource conditions to determine the management actions necessary before normal permitted grazing use is resumed.

### Early Assessment Phase

1. The Idaho State Office (ISO) Division of Resource Services will provide a regular update of current drought conditions and long-range forecasts for adequate moisture to end drought conditions. This procedure will continue through the summer. Potential drought conditions and drought policies and procedures will be evaluated each December.
2. The ISO will participate in the Idaho Rangeland Drought Task Force, a subgroup of the Idaho Water Supply Committee, which consists of representatives for the Idaho Department of Agriculture, Idaho Department of Lands, Idaho Department of Water Resources, Idaho Soil Conservation Commission, Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG), University of Idaho Cooperative Extension, U.S. Forest Service, Idaho Cattle Association, and the Idaho Wool Growers Association.
3. District and/or field offices (FOs) will assemble interdisciplinary (ID) teams to assess the current and cumulative drought conditions within their area of jurisdiction. They will determine the resources that are the most vulnerable and prioritize the areas of emphasis. Information developed by the ID team will be provided to permittees, county agents, county commissioners, recreation groups, congressional representatives, news media, and other stake holders. Contact appropriate U.S. Forest Service and Idaho Department of Lands offices to coordinate anticipated livestock grazing dates and impacts to permittees and public land users. This information will be provided to the ISO and will be shared with the Washington Office.
4. Districts and/or FOs with wild horses should assess the current conditions using the Emergency Gather Criteria released by the National Wildhorse and Burro Program Office. If the assessment determines that an emergency gather may be warranted, immediately notify the ISO Wildhorse Program Leader to begin the process. Early notification is important.
5. The ISO will develop a communication plan to keep drought-related information flowing between the BLM and the appropriate news media, public land users, interest groups, resource advisory councils, and local and state governments. Communication plans will be reviewed and updated periodically during spring and summer.
6. Livestock grazing permittees should be notified in writing as to the potential problems associated with continuing drought conditions. Field managers should use the template letter provided by ISO and modify it, if needed, to their specific areas.
7. Districts and/or FOs should contact the local IDFG offices to coordinate resolution of local issues and concerns related to the drought and habitat conditions.
8. Districts and/or FOs should assess their capability to accomplish their projected annual work plan workload measures and drought-related workload. If workload measures need to be adjusted, immediately contact the appropriate ISO program leader.

### Preseason Assessment Phase

1. Districts and/or FOs evaluate on-the-ground conditions (e.g., residual vegetation, soil moisture, vegetation vigor, available water, and snow pack) to determine the appropriate course of action. Consider factors such as availability of forage, forage utilization or stubble height remaining, soil moisture, years of consecutive drought, grazing use during previous drought years, water source availability, water source supplementation, and distribution. Also consider the needs for wildlife, aquatic resources, recreation, and wild horses when discussing possible changes with permittees and others and making decisions. Areas with winter grazing should assess factors that contribute to appropriate grazing use during the season.
2. Districts and/or FOs contact permittees and interested publics (personal contacts are preferred) to communicate the current conditions and the outlook for adequate water and soil moisture. Possible adjustments to permits will be made on the basis of all appropriate factors including vegetation vigor, residual vegetation, water supplies, and other resource needs.
3. Agreements for adjusting grazing because of drought should be in writing. This protects the parties and reduces the chances for differences in interpretation. When agreements cannot be reached, consider using a third party. If agreements on grazing adjustments are not reached in a timely manner, grazing decisions should be issued in accordance with 43 CFR 4110.3-3(a) or (b). These decisions may be issued as a Final Decision becoming effective the date of issuance or a date specified in the decision. Decisions implementing temporary drought-related adjustments or suspension of grazing will contain an effective date and an ending date. Should it become necessary to extend the decision, a new decision will be issued. If adjustments to permits are requested because of drought-related issues by permittee, the \$10.00 fee for modifying a permit will be waived. The unused grazing fees previously paid will be refunded based on the adjusted permit.
4. Temporary water troughs may be authorized to provide supplemental livestock drinking water. A Categorical Exclusion (CE) (see 516 Departmental Manual 6, Appendix 5.4(D)(2)) is appropriate if: 1) the temporary troughs are not authorized for more than one month; 2) no road construction or other ground-disturbing activities are required; 3) there are no adverse effects on cultural resources, threatened or endangered plants or animals, designated habitat, or special status species or habitat; and 4) the placement of the troughs will not encourage livestock grazing in areas that the animals have not used in the past. Water placement should be in areas that have previous disturbance, such as roads, near existing water developments, or other locally disturbed areas.
5. New water development (i.e., spring developments, new wells, pipeline extensions, roads for water hauling, and other ground-disturbing activities) must have all necessary clearances and meet the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Endangered Species Act (ESA), Clean Water Act, and appropriate legal and regulatory requirements.

### Continuing Assessment Phase

Continuous communication with the permittees, interested publics, and local and state government agencies is important during the grazing season to keep everyone up to date on conditions and actions resulting from drought conditions.

1. Continued monitoring during the grazing season identifies issues and opportunities. Typical monitoring includes use supervision, utilization and stubble height monitoring, streambank alteration, and riparian area disturbance. Monitoring should address reduced utilization of range plants for forage during the first growing season following drought to allow plants to increase root development, replenish carbohydrate reserves, and produce viable seeds. Monitoring should be focused in those crucial areas identified by the ID team. Developing partnerships with permittees and others can help meet monitoring needs. After grazing concludes, sufficient vegetative cover should be maintained to protect watersheds, wildlife habitat, aquatic habitat, and special status species habitat. Of particular concern are habitats for listed and candidate species, and the following sensitive species: sage grouse, pygmy rabbits, red band trout, Yellowstone cutthroat, Packard's milkvetch, Mulford's milkvetch, Indian Valley sedge, Packard's buckwheat, smooth stickleaf, Malheur princesplume, and Owyhee clover.
2. If the monitoring and evaluation concludes that adverse impacts are occurring, Districts and/or FOs must notify permittees immediately and ask them to remove the livestock or make other appropriate adjustments within a given time frame. If agreement cannot be reached, a new decision will be issued. The appropriate consultation and coordination with interested publics should also take place.
3. Maintenance feeding on public land due to drought is prohibited and will not be authorized except in special or emergency situations. An example of a special situation is feeding of sheep at night while they are being trailed over several days. An example of an emergency is feeding livestock that need feed because of a wildfire while they are rounded up and moved out of the area. When a temporary feeding situation is authorized, State certified weed-free hay must be used.
4. The use of salt and certain mineral supplements necessary for animal health may be authorized provided that their use provides for proper rangeland management.

### Post-Drought Phase

Districts and/or FOs should carefully consider lasting drought-caused effects, e.g., stressed vegetation, recharge of ground water, surface water available for livestock use, and soil cover prior to returning livestock grazing to the permitted levels. Following drought, livestock grazing pressure should be light in areas that were moderately to heavily used vegetation during the drought until after seed ripe to allow carbohydrate reserve replenishment, root development, seed production, and reestablishment of biological crusts. Ensure that water sources are providing adequate water for livestock, wildlife, and aquatic needs. Consultation and coordination with the permittees and interested publics must continue.

**Timeframe:** This IM is effective immediately upon release.

**Background:** Drought is a recurring climatic condition in the semiarid portion of Idaho. Long-term or hydrologic drought and abnormally low precipitation for one or more years can affect surface runoff and groundwater. Short-term drought is usually seasonal and primarily affects soil moisture and plant growth.

Short-term drought usually affects the production for that growing season. Perennial plant vigor and carbohydrate reserves are reduced during severe drought. This results in a reduction on forage available and exposes more bare ground increasing the risk of erosion (Valentine, 1990)

The effects of long-term drought can be variable. Locally, forage plant production may be good as a result of precipitation at the appropriate time, while water sources are drying up because of the lack of total precipitation. It can also cause severe stress on plants, resulting in lowered vigor which may take some time to recover (Valentine, 1990). Livestock grazing impacts during drought include increased damage to biological crusts, reduction of ground cover, and increased trampling and shearing of streambanks and spring areas because of increased livestock concentration on fewer available water sources. It is important to manage uses of rangeland during drought because plants are stressed and are subject to damage that will last after the drought has subsided.

Idaho has been experiencing drought conditions since 1999. The U.S. Drought Monitor indicates that Idaho continues to be in severe to extreme drought conditions, indicating that soil moisture is low, water shortages are common and fire danger is high. Chances of the drought ending are low (Drought Termination and Amelioration, April 2003) while the temperature outlook is for above normal temperatures. With the cumulative effects of the past two years' low precipitation, the outlook for this spring is for longer term impacts of drought.

Valentine, J.F. 1990. Grazing Management. Academic Press, Inc. San Diego, CA. pp 314-316.

**Manual/Handbook Sections Affected:** None.

**Coordination:** Development of this policy was coordinated with the Branch of Resources and Sciences, Districts, and Field Offices.

**Contact:** Ervin R. Cowley at (208) 373-3810 (Ervin\_cowley@blm.gov).

**Lower Snake River District with Union:** No Union notification or negotiation is required.

Signed  
K Lynn Bennett  
State Director

Authenticated  
Sharon Olendorff  
Executive Assistant (930)

Attachment  
Template Permittee Letter (1 p)

## TEMPLATE PERMITTEE LETTER

Dear Permittee:

As you are aware, we have been in a severe drought for the past two years. The Palmer Drought Index indicates that much of Idaho continues to be in severe to extreme drought. Long-range forecasts indicate that the chances of recovering from the drought in this coming year are very poor.

It has been long recognized that severe drought reduces plant vigor and food reserves in perennial plants, reducing root growth, plant production, and soil cover. Dr. John F. Valentine states in *Grazing Management*, "Continued stocking at normal levels during moderate or severe drought is probably the greatest cause of range deterioration." He continues, "Care must be taken not to restock to pre-drought levels too rapidly with the return of normal precipitation levels. Drought-stressed plants will be in low vigor and require some time to regain their vigor to resist normal grazing pressure."

Besides the impacts on plants, we anticipate that many water sources will be dry or will dry-up much earlier in the grazing season. This will put additional pressure on the water sources that remain and can cause long lasting damage to plants, stream channels, and water quality.

We understand the hardships drought conditions cause and we would like to help you find solutions and protect the long-term productivity of public land. Therefore, it is important that we begin now to plan for the 2003 grazing season and work together to find ways to lessen the hardships that the drought is causing.

Please contact \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_ of my staff with your concerns and ideas so that we can begin to plan for these possible drought conditions. We will keep you informed of related activities and solutions as they are developed.

Sincerely,

Valentine, J.F. 1990. *Grazing Management*. San Diego, CA: Academic Press, pp 313-314.